

God's Plan (as Opposed to Yours)

Genesis 50:15-21

The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 11, 2011

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

You remember the story about Joseph and his brothers.

Jacob had twelve sons. Joseph was number eleven. When they worked together in the pasture Joseph brought a bad report about his brothers to their father. That is the Bible's way of saying that he was a tattler.

Jacob loved Joseph more than all of his other sons. Jacob gave him a finely ornamented coat, the famous "coat of many colors." He did not give any of Joseph's brothers a similar gift. This made the brothers madder still.

Then Joseph had a couple of dreams. In one dream he and his brothers were out in the field binding grain. All of a sudden Joseph's sheaf stood up. All of his brother's sheaves gathered around Joseph's sheaf and bowed down to it. In the other dream Joseph dreamt that eleven stars, the sun and the moon bowed down to him.

Joseph's brothers were furious. "Does he really think that he will rule over us?" They could not say anything good about him. So the next time that dear old dad sent Joseph out to the pasture to check on his brothers, they saw him coming. They plotted his death. They wanted to kill him. They would take care of that dreamer once and for all.

Some of the brothers thought better of the whole murder plan and they simply grabbed him and tossed him into an empty well. When some Ishmaelites came by they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites ("May as well get some money out of him.") who in turn sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt. They then concocted some kind of story about a wild animal tearing Joseph in pieces. The brothers kept his many colored coat, tore it up, dipped it in goat's blood and presented it to their father that Joseph was dead.

Their plan worked! Joseph was gone! They didn't have to listen to his dreams any more! He is in Egypt! We will never see him again!

Now as life would have it Joseph was first sold to an Egyptian named Potiphar. Joseph worked hard for him. Potiphar saw that he was a hard worker and that his household flourished under Joseph's administration so he put him in charge of the whole house.

Potiphar's wife came on to Joseph. When Joseph refused to commit adultery with her like she wanted, she accused Joseph of attempting adultery. When Potiphar heard the accusation, he threw Joseph in prison.

In prison Joseph worked really hard. The warden put him in charge of the other prisoners including two prisoners who were in trouble with Pharaoh. Joseph interpreted some dreams for these two fellows and lo and behold they came to pass. One of them was released while the other one was hung.

Later when Pharaoh needed some dreams interpreted the guy whom Pharaoh had released remembered that Joseph was good at it. Pharaoh brought Joseph into his court. Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph that he put Joseph in charge of Egypt.

Joseph managed Egypt's grain. Pharaoh's dreams had predicted that there would be seven years of plenty in Egypt and seven years of famine. This came to pass. During the seven years of plenty Joseph stored up the surplus. Then when the seven years of famine came Joseph sold the grain that he had stored

up. He sold it to both Egyptians and foreigners. The net result was that a lot of people's lives were saved. They would have starved to death if it had not been for Joseph.

Then Joseph's brothers show up wanting food because they are hungry also. Through a long and complicated set of events which you can read about in Genesis, Joseph eventually determines that his brothers are now honest men and that they regret their attempted murder of him. Joseph gave them plenty of opportunities to betray each other and they did not take advantage of those opportunities. So Joseph reveals himself to them. All is forgiven. They bring Jacob to Egypt. Joseph is reunited with his father and everything is wonderful until his father dies.

Joseph's brothers are concerned that now that Dad is dead. Joseph may take revenge on them. So they send to Joseph indicating that Jacob had asked Joseph to forgive his brothers even though they had done him evil. Joseph wept when he heard what they said. He said to them, "Am I in the place of God? You planned it for evil. God planned it for good. God planned it for the saving on many lives."

Now listen to that. The brothers intended it for evil. They did not intend it for good. They did not say to themselves, "You know, if we sell Joseph into Egypt I bet that he will become the chief administrator of Pharaoh's lands, he will be a good planner and manager of Egypt, then if there is ever a famine not only will he save Egypt, he'll save us too!" No! They wanted to kill him! They didn't care what God had in mind. They cared only about their hatred of their brother. They regretted selling him into Egypt. They regretted the fact that they hated him. They did not plan to save anyone, but God did.

One could ask, "Could God have saved Egypt and the other nations without Joseph's brothers hating him and selling him into slavery into Egypt?" Are you in the place of God? The brothers planned it for evil, God planned it for good.

There will come the day when you will plan it evil, but God will plan it for good.

Remember King David?

King David was a good king. He was a king after God's own heart. He respected the Lord's anointed. He became the Lord's anointed. God blessed Israel during his reign with an expansion of territory.

One day this righteous king decided to stay home while his army went into battle. While he was home he walked around on the roof of his palace. From his roof he saw a woman bathing. He inquired as to who she was. It turned out that she was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Uriah was a mercenary currently in David's employ and fighting with the rest of David's troops while David was home in Jerusalem. David sent for Bathsheba. When she came to the palace David and Bathsheba committed adultery.

Bathsheba became pregnant. David wanted to cover up his sin so he sent for Uriah the Hittite. Uriah came and David tried on several occasions without success to get Uriah to go home. He figured if Uriah went home it would look the child was Uriah's. Uriah refused to go home. Uriah figured that if the rest of David's troops to say nothing of the ark of God were out on the field of battle it would not be right for him to go home and enjoy the comforts of home and of his wife when everyone else did not have a chance to do so also.

When David saw that Uriah was not going to go home he sent Uriah back to the battle. David commanded his general, Joab, to put Uriah on the front lines of the battle to make sure that he was killed. Joab did so and Uriah was killed.

Now David had committed murder to cover up the fact that he had committed adultery. What was the result of this adulterous relationship? Aside from the wrath of God David and Bathsheba later had a son named Solomon. Solomon was the wisest king of Israel. Under Solomon's reign Israel achieved

the greatest peace and wealth and political affluence that they had ever seen. Solomon established a line of kings from whom our Lord Jesus Christ came. When Jesus came finally there was a descendent of David who actually kept all of the Lord's statutes and commandments. God established David's throne as an everlasting throne under Jesus' reign. Jesus came from Solomon and the marriage between David and Bathsheba that resulted from adultery and murder.

Now when David was on the roof of his palace and he saw Bathsheba naked and wet do you think that he was thinking to himself, "Hm. If I commit adultery with her it will result in the Savior of the world?" No! I'll tell you what David was thinking when he saw Bathsheba naked and wet.... Actually I won't tell you what David was thinking, but you know what David was thinking. Some things are best not said in the pulpit.

But you get the idea. David planned it for evil. God planned it for good, the saving of many lives. In fact in David's case it was the saving of everyone's life.

Are you in the place of God? There will come a time if it has not already come when you planned or will plan something for evil and God will plan it for good. He will take your sin and turn it into good.

The enemies of Jesus had this exact same problem.

They hated Jesus. They hated Jesus because he saw through their hypocrisy. They liked the reputation of righteousness that they had developed. They liked believing that they kept the law. They liked having everyone else believe that they kept the law. The result was some nice advantages for them. Jesus saw right through their hypocrisy. Jesus knew that they only made a show of keeping the Law. They didn't really keep the Law. Jesus was not afraid to tell them so. Jesus was not afraid to tell them so in very public ways. They hated Jesus.

They decided to defame Him. They asked Jesus questions that were designed to show that Jesus didn't know what He was talking about. Jesus always had an answer for them. Irritatingly enough Jesus' answers continued to point out their hypocrisy. It was almost like He could read their minds. When they disputed with Jesus, Jesus won. Jesus won in such a way that their sins were exposed. They hated Jesus.

It didn't help matters much at all that Jesus was popular. He healed people. People liked that. He forgave sinners. Sinners liked that. He taught with authority. People liked that. He performed miracles. People liked that. In fact Jesus had so many followers and crowds that stayed with Him that His enemies figured that the whole world was going after Him. They plotted His death.

The enemies of Jesus had friends in powerful places. The enemies of Jesus were politically astute. They knew how to get the halls of power to work for them. First of all, they had Judas betray Jesus. Secondly, they had Jesus arrested. Thirdly, they put Jesus to a fake trial before the Jewish ruling council. While there they had Jesus blindfolded and struck. I bet that felt good to them. Then they turned Him over to Pontius Pilate. Things got tense when it looked like Pilate was going to release Jesus because Pilate could not find a charge against Jesus to substantiate any kind of penalty. They told Pilate that if he released Jesus he was no friend to Caesar. That got Pilate's attention. He was trying to get in good with Caesar for a promotion. Nevertheless he was not inclined to release an innocent man. When they saw Pilate try to release Jesus again, they cried out for His crucifixion. They cried out so loud for it that Pilate saw a riot about to start. That would not get him in good with Caesar either so he sentenced Jesus to be crucified. He probably figured that it was better if one Jew die than if his political career ended. They flogged Jesus. They put a crown of thorns on His head. They made Him carry His own cross. They drove the nails into His hands and into His feet. Jesus hung there for several hours until He was dead. The result? The salvation of the whole world. By His death Jesus procured the forgiveness of sins for the entire human race. With the forgiveness of your sins you receive eternal life.

Now, did the enemies of Jesus say to themselves, "You know if we just get this guy crucified the result will be the salvation of the whole world!"? No! They wanted Him dead! They hated Him. Did Pilate say to himself, "You know if I hand this man over to be crucified according to their wishes the result will be the salvation of the whole world"? No! He was just trying to do what was best to save his political career. All he could see was his own advancement. They were not thinking about others. They were thinking about themselves. They were planning evil. In the case of Jesus' enemies they had planned this evil for some time. In the case of Pilate the evil became planned over the course of a few hours. They deliberately planned evil against Him.

They planned it for evil. God planned it for good. He planned it for what is happening right now yet to this day, the saving of many lives.

Could God have found some other way to save the world and forgive sins? Are you in the place of God?

And there will come a time if it has not already come when you will plan something for evil. It will be good for you, if like Joseph's brothers, God permits you to live long enough to regret it. You will plan it for evil, but God will plan it for good.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.